



BULLETIN

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service .

U.S. PROPOSES TO LIST THE KOALA AS THREATENED

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to classify the koala, a bearlike tree-dwelling mammal indigenous to Australia, as threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Citing habitat destruction as the primary threat to the survival of koalas in the wild, the Service is seeking additional information and invites public comment on the proposal, which was based on a petition submitted by Australian and U.S. conservation groups.

Listing a foreign animal or plant under the Endangered Species Act raises public awareness of the species' plight and of the need for conservation measures. The proposed listing of the koala, if made final, would prohibit U.S. importation, exportation, and interstate or foreign commerce by anyone subject to U.S. law except under permits issued in advance by the Service. Such permits would be issued only for purposes that would contribute to the conservation of the species. In addition, the United States would assist in conservation programs for koalas.

The koala is a marsupial, more closely related to kangaroos and opossums than to true bears. The species is totally dependent for food and shelter on certain kinds of eucalyptus trees found in the forests and woodlands of the Australian states of central and eastern Queensland, eastern New South Wales, Victoria, and southeastern South Australia. Beloved worldwide because of its cuddly appearance, the koala was first put at risk due to intensive market hunting for its fur up through the 1920s.

By the 1930s, in response to global protests, Australia took steps to stem direct killing. Conservation programs by Australian government agencies contributed to the species' recovery in some areas, with populations estimated to range from 40,000 to 400,000. Today, however, human encroachment and ensuing changes in the koala's habitat are responsible for population decline.

Nearly two-thirds of the koala's eucalyptus forest and woodland ecosystem has already been lost, with the rest rapidly disappearing due to logging, agriculture, and urbanization. In addition, the koala is threatened by widespread fires, domestic dogs, and disease.

In a May 1994 petition to the Service, Australians for Animals and the U.S. Fund for Animals requested listing of the koala. Since that time, the Service has been gathering information and

has now found the proposed listing to be warranted. If this proposed listing is made final, the koala would join the African elephant and the southern African leopard as foreign species listed as threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

Copies of the proposal, which was published in the September 22 Federal Register, may be requested from the Chief, Office of Scientific Authority, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Dr., Room 750, Arlington, VA 22203, or call 703-358-1708. Comments and questions should be submitted to the same address. The deadline for comments is December 21, 1998. The deadline for requests for a public hearing is November 6, 1998.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System comprised of more than 500 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies.

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